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April 7, 2022

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense, Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin:

On April 5, 2022, you testified to the House Armed Services Committee that the United States is not behind in the development and fielding of hypersonic weapons in relation to China and Russia. You made this assessment despite admitting earlier in the same hearing that you did not know the inventories of Chinese hypersonic weapons. When I mentioned the United States has indeed fallen behind China and Russia in hypersonic weapon development and fielding, you replied “What do you mean we’re behind in hypersonics? How do you make that assessment?” This question was concerning considering the assessment was based in full on briefs I and other members of Congress have received from your Department’s subject matter experts.

On Friday, March 18, 2022, at 10:00 AM in room 2212 of the Rayburn House Office Building, the Cyber, Innovative Technologies, and Information Systems and Strategic Forces subcommittees received a classified briefing on Department of Defense, Army, Navy, and Air Force/National Air and Space Intel Center (NASIC) hypersonic efforts. The briefers included: Mr. Michael White, Principal Director for Hypersonics, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering; Vice Admiral Johnny Wolfe, Director, Strategic Systems Programs, Department of the Navy; LTG L. Neil Thurgood, Director of Hypersonics, Directed Energy, Space, and Rapid Acquisition, Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics, and Technology; Lt Gen Duke Richardson, Military Deputy, Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics; Mr. Dillon Stenger, NASIC, Department of the Air Force.

Your testimony on April 5, 2022, calls into question the assessments made by the subject matter experts you sent to brief members of Congress on March 18, 2022. Furthermore, your testimony on April 5, 2022, and its conflict with your Department’s subject matter experts, sends a confusing message to the American people who you have vowed to defend and whose tax dollars are used to fund U.S. hypersonic weapons development. We owe it to them to provide the most accurate assessment of how their tax dollars are being spent to further our country’s defense.

To that end, I am calling on you to declassify the materials provided to Congress during the March 18, 2022, brief. Please clarify the confusion caused by your contradiction of your own subject matter experts for members of Congress and the American people.

Sincerely,
Matt Gaetz
Member of Congress